

## **Call It the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Dictatorships**

Business as usual as Zimbabwe takes a seat.

By Claudia Rosett

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With Zimbabwe elected Friday to chair the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, we now have the latest poster-child for the usual U.N. Orwellian abuse of the noble mandate, glorious goals, and all those good things promised by the free world in concert with the U.S.S.R.'s Joseph Stalin back at the U.N. founding in 1945.

Let's get real. Zimbabwe's U.N. coup is not some extraordinary aberration, any more than the massive corruption under Oil-for-Food was due simply to some sort of unfortunate administrative fumbling at the top. This is how the U.N. works. This is how the U.N., as a grand collective, was, unfortunately, configured to work. This is how the U.N. — rolling in American money and support, but lacking any reasonable system of checks, balances, and accountability — will continue to work.

There is by now every sign that the endless production of reports, proposals, and strategies for U.N. reform — an output which during the final two years of the Oil-for-Food-beset former Secretary-General Kofi Annan began to stack toward the ceiling — serves chiefly to produce new programs, projects, and initiatives, coupled with fresh U.N. demands for money. That yields fresh U.N. turf which can then be captured by the same corrupt and unaccountable thugocracy.

In adding to that stack, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, with his crew of holdovers from the 1997-2006 Annan era, is now embellishing on the same-old patronage networks — though given time, the odds are good that new networks and accompanying travesties will emerge. Ban will, of course, be able to invoke the same excuse as Kofi Annan: In a system where the buck stops nowhere, any wrongdoing is always someone else's fault, and almost all responsibility in the end seeps away into the quick-sands of the 15-member Security Council, the 192-member General Assembly, or is laid at the door of former employees residing comfortably beyond reach of U.S. extradition.

In recent years, we've seen the Human Rights Commission, chaired in 2003 by Libya, "reformed" into the current Human Rights Council — which spends even more time than its discredited predecessor doing nothing but condemning democratic Israel. We've seen peacekeepers raping the people they are supposed to protect, with each U.N. "zero tolerance" pronouncement followed by fresh scandal. We've seen Iran elected as a vice chair of the U.N. Disarmament Commission. North Korea currently serves on the executive boards of both UNICEF and the U.N. flagship agency, the U.N. Development Program, or UNDP. Since the January Cash-for-Kim expose of the UNDP allegedly ladling out hard currency to North Korea's Kim Jong II, Ban's promise of a thorough and independent inquiry has been morphing into a cover-up in which U.N. auditors have yet to set foot in North Korea, or even request visas. And when it comes to the U.N. dealing with malignant rogue states, such as

Iran and North Korea — or Saddam Hussein's Iraq before that — U.N. sanctions have become a dangerous farce, in which the main effects are to enrich sanctions busters without actually containing the virulent regimes.

As for the U.N.'s "Commission on Sustainable Development," Zimbabwe's new pride of place is just one symptom of deeper U.N. problems. We can now expect renewed hand-wringing over the U.N. set-up in which regional groupings take turns electing the leaders of assorted U.N. commissions. In this case, it was Africa's turn, and for reasons that probably would not look good in daylight, the assembled political leaders of Africa chose Zimbabwe (just as they picked Libya in 2003 to chair the Human Rights Commission).

In truth, it was in many ways an appropriate choice. This commission was set up under the auspices of the U.N. General Assembly's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as one of the multitude of U.N. initiatives to follow up on the 1992 Rio de Janeiro "Earth Summit," orchestrated by longtime U.N. eminence Maurice Strong — who sometime around mid-2005, during the Oil-for-Food investigations by both the U.N. and the U.S. Department of Justice, decamped to do business in the People's Republic of China. Strong is a self-declared socialist, who designed Kofi Annan's initial 1997 round of U.N. "reforms." While engaged in those labors, Strong accepted a check for \$988,885 bankrolled by the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein and delivered by a South Korean businessman, Tongsun Park — sentenced to five years in prison following his conviction last summer in New York federal court on charges of conspiring to bribe U.N. officials to rig Oil-for-Food on behalf of Saddam. Strong has denied any wrongdoing, and has not been accused of breaking any laws. But somehow the U.N. has never specifically addressed the conflict-of-interest entailed in the act of a senior adviser and U.N. under-secretary-general — which Strong then was — accepting an undisclosed six-figure private payment while designing a sweeping, high-level U.N. reform package.

Anyway, as one of the many U.N. instruments set up within the U.N.'s ever-expanding bureaucracy to pursue Strong's enthusiasm for planet powwows, the Commission on Sustainable Development ("sustainable" being one of Strong's trademark buzzwords) today boasts among its 53 members a collection of states which specialize not in development — sustainable or otherwise — but in policies ranging from off-the-charts corruption to systematic repression to genocide. Among the least offensive (which is not saying much) are: Cameroon, Tunisia, Tanzania, Guinea, Russia, and China. Among the most spectacular are such perennial items on the world's-worst-regimes roster as: Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Belarus, Sudan, Iran, and North Korea. Plus, of course, Zimbabwe — reduced under the long and ruinous rule of President Robert Mugabe from a breadbasket of southern Africa to a famished, violence-wracked, showcase of backward motion and misery.

Put together, the 13 states listed above, despite including Security Council Permanent-Five veto-wielding movers and shakers Russia and China, pay a grand total of 4.941 percent of U.N. core assessed dues. That's less than one quarter of the 22 percent paid by the U.S., and in all likelihood their combined percentage contribution is even less than that, if total U.S. funding of more than \$5 billion for the entire sprawling U.N. system's \$20 billion-plus budget (including voluntary contributions), is taken into account.

For the crowd above, the apparently bottomless pockets of American taxpayers translate into a sustainable free ride. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Bush

White House, apart from its failed effort to keep Ambassador John Bolton on the job, has been curiously kind to the vices of this dysfunctional and despot-infested global conglomerate we call the United Nations. What little oversight the U.N. has had in recent years came mainly from a Republican Congress — now gone.

Even in 2005-2006, despite Bolton's push for U.N. reform, and the appalling evidence of U.N. misdeeds unearthed by investigators in both the House and Senate, there was in the end no real discipline imposed. The U.S., despite threats last year, withheld no dues, and lavished billions more on the U.N. in voluntary donations. Since the 2003 Security Council showdown over Iraq — in which we now know that Security Council members Russia, France and China were awash in Saddam's Oil-for-Food money — the U.S. has returned meekly to the fold. Since Condoleezza Rice in 2005 took charge of the State Department, and with it, the U.S.-U.N. relationship, the U.S. has obligingly submitted its vital security interests to the ineffectual and cheating ministrations of the U.N. Security Council. The results to date include a nuclear test by North Korea, and aggressive pursuit of the nuclear bomb by Iran.

How the U.S. might escape this U.N. cycle of insanity is hard to say, given the vested interests of our own political establishment in supporting a U.N. that is, in the end, a corrosive and debilitating influence on our own government. But one way to start is by telling the truth. And with this latest outrage, the Commission on Sustainable Development has, in its way, offered a handy opening. How about renaming this outfit, now chaired by Zimbabwe, to reflect the realities within — call it the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Dictatorships.